

News From the Legislature

State Representative **Ross Hunter**

**48th
Legislative
District**



Gearing Up for 2008

Dear Neighbors,

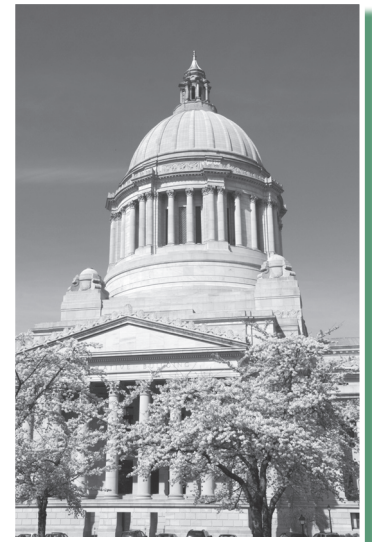
The 2008 session is about to begin, and though it's a short one (only 60 days) lawmakers have plenty to do. Inside you'll find my thoughts on some of the issues I'll be working on as well as a recap of recent election results and how they'll impact our work in the Legislature.

As always, I welcome your thoughts and encourage you to call, write or even drop by our office. And for those of you who visit my website, be sure to take a look at the new online survey we posted – it's an easy way for you to tell me what you think about the year's big issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in green ink that reads "Ross Hunter".

Rep. Ross Hunter



Keeping in touch

Committees:

Finance (Chair)
Appropriations
Appropriations Subcommittee
on Education

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Website (and link to online survey):

www.housedemocrats.wa.gov/members/hunter

★ ★ Town Hall Schedule ★ ★

**Mark your calendars to join Reps. Hunter
and Eddy and Sen. Tom for a
48th District Town Hall!**

- **Wednesday, January 9 – 6 p.m.** Crossroads Community Center
16000 NE 10th St., Bellevue
- **Saturday, February 9 – 10 a.m.** Kirkland City Hall
123 Fifth Ave., Kirkland
- **Saturday, March 22 – 10 a.m.** Bellevue City Hall
450 110th Ave. NE, Bellevue

Hi, it's George Bush (or Bill Clinton) and I want you to vote for...

In 2007 I introduced a bill that would have effectively prohibited political campaigns from using automatic dialers and recorded messages during your dinner hour. Unfortunately, the bill died in the Rules Committee. I am working on a strategy to bring the bill up for a vote this session, where I believe I will prevail. Please call or email me if you believe this is bad public policy. Note: I don't answer the phone during dinner...

On a related note, the Federal Trade Commission is not going to "expire" your registration on the "Do Not Call" list, which should block most commercial calls. Their original intent was to expire registrations after 5 years, but they have reconsidered their policy. If you want to register your phone number or check if your number is on the list, you can visit www.donotcall.gov.



Education

■ HJR 4204 - Simple Majority

This past November, the voters approved HJR 4204 (Simple Majority)! School advocates have worked on this issue for over 30 years and the success of the measure is heartening. Over 2/3 of the Legislature, including both Democrats and Republicans, voted to support this change in the state constitution. Now, school district levies can pass with a 50% vote, just like operating levies for ports, fire districts, cities and counties. This is an issue of fundamental fairness to school children across the state.



■ Graduation Requirements

The State Board of Education has been tasked with recommending changes to graduation requirements beyond the basic skills test we currently administer. I've been pushing them to set the bar high enough that a student who meets our minimum requirement is prepared to take non-remedial classes in community college and meets the basic entry requirements of our four-year college system.

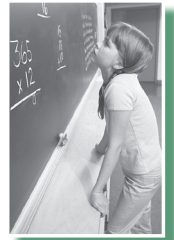
This would increase the number of "core" classes many students take in high school and would significantly reduce the number of students taking remedial reading, writing and mathematics in college. In many community colleges this rate

is over 50%. Remedial classes are expensive for both the student and the state and make it difficult for a student to finish school in a timely fashion.

The State Board should complete their recommendations in the next few months and you can be sure I'll report back on their work.

■ Mathematics and Science

Last year, driven by the anemic 50% pass rate on the 10th grade mathematics WASL test, I wrote a bill (HB 1906) to change the mathematics standards we use to drive curriculum selection in Washington. The State Board of Education (SBE) was responsible for analyzing our current standards, and the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) is responsible for drafting new standards based on the results of the SBE report. The report was excellent, and OSPI is currently re-writing the standards.



We are engaged in a similar review process for science instruction. I'll release interim results as they become available.

As we raise the requirements for students in mathematics and science, I believe we will have to require additional time for students in school to ensure students receive a well-rounded education, including history, geography, economics, art, foreign languages and more. We are one of the few countries in the industrialized nations to have fewer than 200 days a year in school - we're at 180.

■ A New Way to Fund "Basic Education"

We currently fund schools based on an outdated 30-year-old formula that simply doesn't work any more. I serve on a task force that is responsible for re-defining our overly complex and inadequate system of school funding. Our mission is to re-define "basic education" and propose a set of funding mechanisms that would support the goals laid out in the new definition.



I believe that our first step, and one that the Legislature should act on this year, is to simplify the way we write the budget so the process and the budget are more transparent and understood by the general public.

We should also take steps to simplify the accounting required at the local school district level, reduce the number of accountants hired by the districts and significantly reduce the amount they spend on computer software to do the reporting. To give you some context on the total budget, Washington ranked 46th in the nation in student to teacher ratio accord-

ing to the National Center for Education Statistics (2004). Our graduation rate for public high schools isn't much better – the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (2005) ranks us 33rd out of the 50 states.

I will make a proposal about restructuring the budget, and simplifying the requirements on local districts this session.

Transportation - What do we do now?

With the failure of Proposition 1 this past election we are at a serious crossroads in transportation policy. In the past five years we have made significant new investments in our transportation system, mostly by raising the gas tax. We're still behind in maintaining our transportation system, let alone increasing capacity to manage the growth in population, but these investments are starting to pay off with major improvements moving forward on I-405, SR 167 and other major roadways.



Unfortunately, the biggest projects are still staring at us, waiting to be funded. The RTID package presented in Prop 1 would have completed the funding for a six-lane bridge on SR 520 with the Pacific Interchange design on the west side of the lake.

There are many reasons voters didn't fund RTID/Sound Transit Phase II including concerns about global warming, not enough (or too much) investment in transit, not enough (or too much) investment in roads and the fact that the measure simply had too much stuff in it.

I believe we need a much simpler proposal. My main concern in the 48th District is to fund the 520 bridge. I see a number of options and value your opinions.

- Start tolling 520 now to build up the fund to improve the bridge. We will probably need to toll I-90 as well so that it doesn't turn into a parking lot.
- Impose a regional gas tax increase. I think this would have to go to a vote of the people in the district, or be imposed by a regional body like the King County Council.

- Redirect other money. It might not make sense to start running ferries from Kirkland to Seattle before we put funding in place to fix the bridge. We need to more carefully prioritize investments.

I believe we must also address regional transportation governance so that we don't have to deal with this kind of political hodge-podge again. The current setup of the Sound Transit and RTID governing boards keeps them focused on pleasing individual constituencies with projects in their districts rather than trying to fix the overall system. I'm not convinced we'll come up with the correct solution in the short 2008 session, but we should address this in 2009.

Most importantly, state government needs to continue to prove that they can complete any and all new projects on-time and on-budget. It is important to show that state government knows it is people's hard-earned dollars that are paying for these projects.

I'd love to hear what you think about transportation and other issues. Please take my online survey at:

www.housedemocrats.wa.gov/members/hunter

Tax Policy - I-747 Court Case

In November the Washington Supreme Court

ruled Initiative 747 unconstitutional. The Legislature re-instated the law during a Special Session. As chairman of the House Finance Committee,

I believe it was the right thing to do to keep the current system in place until we can come up with a better property tax system.

Overall property values increased 8.4% per year between 1997 and 2007. At the same time, state and local property taxes increased by 5.3% per year. Approximately half of this is growth is due to voter approved levies. New construction accounts for 1.8% in levy growth, leaving the rate increase faced by existing homeowners at 1%.

There is a lot of concern about how rising property valuations have resulted in significantly higher property tax bills,



Rep. Hunter addresses the Legislature during the Special Session on property taxes.

particularly for seniors who have been in their houses for a long time. This is a real problem and I don't see I-747 having solved it.

Over the next two years I intend to have the Finance Committee consider several alternatives to the current way we assess property taxes. There are several interesting ideas we should look at. The two I find most interesting are a circuit breaker and a homestead exemption.

A circuit breaker system limits the amount of property tax you pay on your primary residence to a certain percentage of your income. This is particularly interesting in the case of seniors who have been in a home for a long time and then retire, reducing their income.

A homestead exemption subtracts a certain amount from the value of the primary residence of every taxpayer. For example, an exemption of \$500,000 would result in you paying taxes only on the value of your home over \$500,000. This particular amount would result in half the residents of the 48th district not paying property taxes, so it's probably too high, but you get the idea.

There are real issues with these approaches. They both require constitutional amendments, so we need to think them through quite carefully. There are impacts on other taxpayers as well - if someone doesn't pay taxes everyone else has to pick up the slack. I want to see modeling of the proposals before signing off on them and I'll share the results of this work as we do it.

Rainy Day Fund

When I first came to the Legislature in 2003 we faced a huge budget deficit and I had to vote for a number of dramatic cuts in critical services. If we'd had a rainy day fund we would have been able to retain these services for taxpayers.

That's why I'm proud the proposal for a rainy day fund passed in this election. I was the prime sponsor of this bill in the House and wrote the voter's guide statement for the proposed amendment. I believe the fund will result in a smoothing of our revenue - saving some money during flush years and having a fund to dip into in leaner years. This is the kind of policy that many families adopt and the state should adopt it as well.



The 2008 session is about to begin - What do you think lawmakers should focus on?

Visit my online survey to tell me about your priorities: www.housedemocrats.wa.gov/members/hunter

Or attend one of my town hall meetings: January 9 – 6 p.m.; February 9 – 10 a.m.; March 22 – 10 a.m.

Or sign up for e-newsletters: E-mail me at Hunter.Ross@leg.wa.gov and ask to subscribe to my email updates.

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GEARING UP FOR 2008

Rep. Ross Hunter

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